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## PROGRAMME QUESTIONS AND OTHER MATTERS
## IMPROVEMENT OF THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION

Note by the Secretary-General

CONTENTS


| | | Paragraphs | Page |
|---|---|---|---|
| INTRODUCTION | | 1-5 | 2 |
| I. | SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION | 6-13 | 3 |
| | A. Agenda | 7 | 3 |
| | B. Advance selection of specific topics for in-depth consideration | 8 | 3 |
| | C. Inter-sessional expert group meetings | 9 | 3 |
| | D. In-session open-ended working groups | 10 | 3 |
| | E. Organization of the work of future sessions | 11 | 3 |
| | F. Draft resolutions for adoption by the Economic and Social Council | 12 | 4 |
| | G. Membership of the Commission and frequency and duration of sessions | 13 | 4 |
| II. | FOCUSING THE AGENDA OF THE COMMISSION: SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS BY GOVERNMENTS | 14-51 | 4 |
| | A. General review of the world social situation | 16-21 | 4 |
| | B. Monitoring of plans and activities | 22-26 | 6 |
| | C. In-depth consideration of specific subjects | 27-51 | 6 |
| III. | IMPROVING THE SUBSTANTIVE OUTPUT OF THE COMMISSION | 52-62 | 11 |
| | A. Resolutions and policy recommendations | 52-59 | 11 |
| | B. Preparation for substantive discussions | 60-62 | 12 |
| IV. | MEMBERSHIP AND FREQUENCY AND DURATION OF THE SESSIONS | 63-70 | 13 |
| V. | SECRETARIAT SUPPORT | 71-72 | 14 |


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## INTRODUCTION

1. The Economic and Social Council, in resolution 1987/50, approved the proposals adopted by the Commission for Social Development at its thirtieth session on the improvement of its work, as contained in the annex to its resolution 30/2. 1/

2. The Commission considered a large number of suggestions for improving its work, and agreed on proposals relating to its agenda, its substantive output, preparations for its deliberations and Secretariat support.

3. Paragraph 10 of the annex to resolution 30/2 reflects the Commission's decision that, in order to focus its agenda and improve its substantive output, its work in selected areas requires more effective preparation and consultation among its members, and that themes for consideration at its sessions should be selected sufficiently in advance to permit the Secretariat to undertake the necessary research and analysis. Accordingly, themes for the sessions held during the period of each medium-term plan of the United Nations should, where possible, be identified in advance. Themes for the next planning period would be selected at the thirty-first session of the Commission, on the basis of full consultation with Governments.

4. In a note verbale to Governments, dated 11 December 1987, the Secretary-General invited suggestions on topics that might be considered at that session, with a view to their inclusion as themes for subsequent sessions. Replies were received from 28 Governments, 14 of which are members of the Commission.*

5. At the same time, as stated in paragraph 13 of the annex to resolution 30/2, the Commission decided, after an exchange of views, that the matter of its membership and frequency and duration of its meetings required further consideration by the Special Commission of the Economic and Social Council on the In-depth Study of the United Nations Intergovernmental Structure and Functions in the Economic and Social Fields. Accordingly, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1987/50, requested the Secretary-General to submit Commission resolution 30/2 to the Special Commission. The Council further decided to consider the question of membership of the Commission for Social Development and the frequency and duration of its meetings at its first regular session of 1989, taking into account the conclusions of the Special Commission and the discussion and recommendations of the Commission at its thirty-first session.

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*Argentina;+ Barbados; Bulgaria; Burkina Faso; Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic; Canada; Chile;+ Cyprus;+ Czechoslovakia; Dominican Republic;+ Finland;+ German Democratic Republic;+ Germany, Federal Republic of;+ Haiti;+ Iran (Islamic Republic of);+ Japan; Morocco; Netherlands; Norway;+ Philippines;+ Poland;+ Spain;+ Sweden; Union of Soviet Socialist Republics;+ United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; United States of America;+ Uruguay; Yugoslavia.

+State member of the Commission for Social Development.

## I. SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION

6. On the basis of t.e proposals adopted by the Commission for Social Development for improvement of its work as set forth in the annex to its resolution 30/2, 1/ and taking into account the views expressed in response to the note verbale, the Secretary-General suggests the following specific measures that the Commission may wish to consider at its thirty-first session. The main proposals set forth in the annex to resolution 30/2, with observations as appropriate and other relevant background information, as well as the replies to the note verbale, are summarized in this and subsequent sections.

### A. Agenda

7. The Commission may wish to organize its future agenda around three main substantive items: general review of the world social situation; monitoring of plans and programmes of action and the results of international conferences; and in-depth consideration of specific topics.

### B. Advance selection of specific topics for in-depth consideration

8. If the Commission decides to give in-depth consideration to specific topics at future sessions, it may wish to select two topics for its next session. It may also select one topic for its thirty-third session, leaving the final decision regarding a second, or a possible third topic, to the thirty-second session, thus striking a balance between advance planning and flexibility.

### C. Inter-sessional expert group meetings

9. The Commission may wish to recommend convening an expert group meeting to consider each of the topics selected for in-depth discussion at its thirty-second session, and approve their terms of reference. The meetings would consider the relevant topic at the technical level and submit policy-oriented recommendations to the Commission. Participants could be governmental or non-governmental experts, or a combination of the two, as appropriate. The Commission would determine the formula for membership: for example, participants could be nominated by the Secretary-General in accordance with equitable geographical distribution; membership could be open to all members of the Commission; or it could be open-ended, with countries specifying their interest in participating or nominating experts. The convening of expert group meetings under the regular budget would have financial implications and the approval of the General Assembly would need to be sought. The Commission may wish to recommend other ways of meeting the costs of expert group meetings, including use of extra-budgetary resources.

### D. In-session open-ended working groups

10. To permit a thorough discussion of selected topics and expert group recommendations, the Commission may wish to convene open-ended in-session working groups. Meetings of such working groups would be held consecutively, with interpretation services, during the hours allocated to the Commission's regular meetings.

### E. Organization of the work of future sessions

11. The Commission currently meets for eight working days, with two meetings each day. The Commission may, for future sess.ons, consider allocating the time available in accordance with an indicative schedule comprising a total of

14 meetings, not including the opening and closing meetings, distributed as follows: four or five for general discussion on the world social situation and the monitoring of plans and programmes of action; five or six (in sessional open-ended working groups) on specific topics; two or three for informal consultations on draft proposals; and one or two for other matters.

### F. Draft resolutions for adoption by the Economic and Social Council

12. The Commission may wish to consider limiting the number of such draft resolutions, inter alia, by consolidating texts on the same agenda item or topic.

### G. Membership of the Commission and frequency and duration of sessions

13. The Commission may wish to give further consideration to this matter and make specific recommendations to the Economic and Social Council. It may also wish to examine the feasibility of convening one or more special sessions. For example, a session might be planned for the fifth anniversary of the Inter-regional Consultation on Developmental Social Welfare Policies and Programmes (held from 7 to 15 September 1987). Other special sessions, perhaps shorter than the regular sessions, could be devoted to specific subjects or to the situation of social groups identified by the Commission.

## II. FOCUSING THE AGENDA OF THE COMMISSION: SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS BY GOVERNMENTS

14. As indicated earlier, the sample of responses to the Secretary General's enquiry is too small to reflect the views of all Member States. This notwithstanding, it does reflect a very wide spectrum of opinions and interests. Both these elements may create a dilemma for the Commission in rationalizing its work and establishing priorities, particularly in regard to the choice of major themes and topics. These are manifold, as demonstrated in the 28 replies from Governments. In order to facilitate their consideration by the Commission, the summary of the replies has been presented under broad headings, grouped according to the suggested overall approach.

15. The Commission for Social Development, in paragraphs 2-5 of the annex to its resolution 30/2, 1/ proposed a three-tiered structure for the agenda of future sessions, to provide a more selective focus. This format would encompass: (a) a general review of the world social situation; (b) the monitoring of international plans, programmes and other activities; and (c) an in-depth consideration of specific subjects. Government suggestions for items of discussion within this structure, including topics to be discussed in depth, are summarized below.

### A. General review of the world social situation

16. The purpose of a general review of the world social situation is to provide a broad survey of social trends and issues and to identify emerging concerns; to permit an examination of the implementation of the recommendations set out in the Declaration on Social Progress and Development (General Assembly resolution 2542 (XXIV)); and to describe significant national experiences in the broad aspects of social development.

17. Many Governments expressed views on the quadrennial reports on the world social situation and confirmed the importance of discussion of them in the Commission for a better awareness of global social development issues. In the words of one Government:

> "There is a need to focus attention on the discussion of global social problems. The examination of these issues must be based on a study of concrete international and national experience in the development and qualitative renewal of contemporary society. In this connection, we are in favour of the Secretariat continuing to prepare reports on the world social situation, the discussion of which provides an opportunity not only for an analysis of unresolved social problems but also the identification of ways to overcome them."

18. One Government stated that the report and the Commission's discussions might serve as the basis for intensifying an exchange of views and encouraging international co-operation, and in particular South-south co-operation, in the solution of social problems for the enhancement of social security and the preservation of world peace. Another suggested the Commission might review the report with a view to improving its practical usefulness to Governments, possibly by dealing with specific themes. A third suggested that the report should raise priority issues and describe national priorities in social development, especially in rural areas; it should not limit itself to an analysis of socio-economic factors, but deal in a positive way with factors related to moral values. It was this Government's view that the perceived decline of moral values should be considered in the discussions of the Commission, since ensuring spiritual well-being was one of the objectives of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development.

19. It was the opinion of another Government that the review of the world social situation should focus on broad social trends and issues, but should not emphasize national reports prepared by Member States, since these, it felt, had proved to be often of limited value and interest.

20. In the view of one Government, the Commission should provide a platform for the discussion of different approaches to global problems and social development. ( ven the strongly held view that global problems were often interlinked, the elaboration of more effective forms of international co-operation might result from discussion of the world social situation. The Commission should therefore be the focus for comprehensive activities and debates on issues that had global significance, such as ecological problems, demography, hunger and malnutrition, or health issues such as AIDS. The discussion of the world social situation should keep Member States abreast of changes occurring throughout the world and inform them of new trends in international thinking. The Commission should also encourage discussion and understanding of social problems that had yet to achieve widespread attention. Another Government suggested a geographical approach, whereby at each session the Commission would consider the social situation of a particular region.

21. One Government advocated focusing on the main principles, aims, means and methods of social progress. The discussion would cover the principal qualitative requisites and criteria for social progress, such as equitable income distribution; equality of opportunity; provision of social security; and elimination of handicaps for the lowest income groups or those suffering from discrimination. It would also be useful to develop a framework for the definition of the concept of social justice. Another Government suggested that the discussion should include consideration of the favourable effect of

disarmament on social progress. In the view of another Government, the quality of the discussion could be improved by developing a uniform framework by which Governments could be guided in the preparation of their statements.

## B. Monitoring of plans and activities

22. In the view of many Governments, the Commission should help to monitor international plans and programmes of action, the results of international conferences, and the work of the United Nations in the social development field. One Government referred also to the desirability of monitoring the work of autonomous institutes affiliated to the United Nations.

### 1. Youth, Aging, Disabled Persons

23. Nearly every Government which suggested topics for in-depth discussion mentioned one or all of the social groups for which plans or programmes of action had already been drawn up: youth, the aging and the disabled. The replies indicated strong support for continued monitoring of the implementation of the existing mechanisms. There were few suggestions for modifying the work already undertaken by the Commission in these areas.

### 2. Guiding Principles for Developmental Social Welfare Policies and Programmes in the Near Future

24. Many Governments underlined the importance of the Guiding Principles for Developmental Social Welare Policies and Programmes in the Near Future (E/CONF.80/10) as an appropriate framework for future work in social development. One Government recommended that the Commission review the policy framework offered in the Guiding Principles and translate it into a coherent programme of work, outlining priorities for action, how such action might be carried out and the resources required. According to another Government, the Guiding Principles offered a chance for the Commission to increase the substantive scope of its work and broaden its thematic range.

25. One Government suggested that additional interregional consultations should be held, in order for social welfare policies and programmes for development to be examined and brought up to date in the light of the overall world social situation and of changing socio-economic conditions.

### 3. Monitoring the work of autonomous institutes

26. One Government proposed that the Commission should undertake regular reviews of the activities of the European Centre for Social Welfare Training and Research. The aim would be to enhance its role, strengthen its professional capacity, enabling it to plan programme activities on a medium- to long-term basis, and apply its findings in the activities of other regional Centres.

## C. In-depth consideration of specific subjects

27. All the replies stressed that discussion in the Commission should focus on a few carefully chosen subjects, taking into account special concerns of the developing countries. Selected issues discussed should take into account the subjects included in the Declaration on Social Progress and Development that were not dealt with in depth by other intergovernmental bodies.

28. The suggestions made ranged over general issues of social development and others relating to specific social groups. For the sake of conciseness, the comments and suggestions have been divided into categories. The first two

topics listed, namely the relationship between social and economic development, and the encouragement of popular participation in the delivery of social welfare services, are largely thematic in nature and encompass several interrelated questions. The other topics are more limited in scope.

1. Relationship between economic and social development

29. This is a broad category, under which many ideas are subsumed: the potential social consequences of economic change, including the effects of economic adjustment policies on social welfare; the importance of social investment for economic development; the impact of new technologies on social welfare; the potential effects of technological change on national cultural identity and peoples' perceived needs; and the need to incorporate social issues more fully in the next International Development Strategy.

(a) The potential social consequences of economic change

30. Several Governments devoted considerable attention to the influence of economic factors on the social situation of nations. One requested the Commission to encourage Governments to seek compatibility between macro-economic strategies and social development policies. Another suggested that the Commission discuss national experience in the application of socio-economic planning designed to overcome social inequality, raise the prosperity of the people and achieve social justice.

31. Several countries recognized that economic constraints, and particularly the economic adjustment policies in force or being elaborated in some developing countries, will affect the delivery of social welfare services. A number of Governments underlined the need to evaluate these social costs. At the same time, it was recognized by some that social welfare programmes must respond to requirements of structural adjustment. It was suggested that the Commission could usefully identify criteria for the efficient allocation of resources.

32. Several Governments stressed the importance of adopting measures to ensure co-ordination within the United Nations system in designing a broad and comprehensive approach to problems of social development, including better integrated and mutually supporting economic and social development policies.

(b) Importance of social investment for economic development

33. Several Governments suggested that the Commission should also discuss the potential benefits resulting from investment in social programmes. Too often, in the view of one Government, social action was regarded as unproductive and therefore attracted little notice on the part of the authorities. The Commission might provide a useful service by encouraging Governments to give more attention to social development programmes in their national planning.

(c) Impact of new technologies on social welfare

34. Since technological change influenced social development, some Governments contended that the Commission should consider the interrelationship between technological development and the social situation of populations. For example, the introduction of new technology presented a challenge to policy-makers. On the one hand, workers could lose their jobs because of industrial restructuring and automation; on the other hand, that process often created employment. On the basis of national experiences and international studies, one Government recommended that the Commission study the social implications of the applica-

tion of new technologies; another Government, of a developing country, stressed the need to integrate new technologies into traditional activities in social welfare and social development.

(d) Potential effects of technological change on national cultural identity

35. One Government encouraged the Commission to determine how the international transfer of information could be helped and to discuss such topics as the threat to national identity posed by the "micro-electronics revolution" and the expansion of video and satellite television. It also requested that the Commission consider the effects of increased exposure to international media on individual consumption patterns and what people perceived as their needs, especially in view of the disparities in income throughou' the world.

(e) The need to incorporate awareness of social issues in a new international development strategy

36. Several Governments expressed the opinion that economic and social development were fundamentally matters of policy and that the social sector should be given equal weight in policy-making. It must become an aggressive tool for social development and for creating social and economic processes that would lead to greater well-being for all people and not just to economic growth. In the opinion of one Government of a developing country, the approaches followed in the first and second United Nations development decades had achieved results that could be described as "growth without development". Accordingly, the question arose of how economic development can be directed at benefiting the entire society. This was felt to be particularly relevant to the drawing up of an international development strategy for the 1990s.

## 2. Participation in social welfare

37. One Government stressed the relevance of discussions to encourage the participation by the broad masses of the population in the achievement of social progress and development. Many other Governments took a more specific view of participation as individual involvement in the selection and delivery of social welfare services.

38. A major trend in the delivery of social services may be identified from the replies received. Several issues came under the broad theme of "choice in social care provision". The main one is the choice of providers: the right of the client to have a range of services available, to express a preference, and to have that preference respected. Providers might include local and private agencies, voluntary non-profit-making organizations, and commercial concerns, rather than just Governments. This theme might also embrace priorities in the allocation of resources between individually oriented social services for the client and developmental social welfare focused on the community. Also to be considered is the preservation of existing statutory rights of individuals, should resources be diverted to community-based schemes.

39. Many Governments suggested that the promotion of individual and group participation in social welfare activities should be a basic objective of social policy, because the direct participation by people in the solution of their problems was essential to programme effectiveness. Proposals included the provision of opportunities for greater involvement by beneficiaries in decision-making and the implementation of programmes; training of volunteers and community leaders; education of social workers and provision of in-service

training; and promotion of self-help activities. A major theme was the desire to discover ways of preventing institutionalized poverty and dependence on welfare.

40. The important contribution of voluntary and non-governmental organizations was also frequently mentioned. Voluntarism was encouraged in one reply, not just on account of the important services it contributed, but also because of its all-encompassing effect on the nature of society. According to one Government:

> "Volunteer work in several social areas is becoming more and more important in industrialized societies, characterized by more leisure time, an increasing number of aging people, many more single-person households and continued large numbers of unemployed workers; in developing countries, volunteer organizations traditionally play an important role in the provisions of social welfare. Volunteer work deserves particular attention from the Commission, especially in light of the necessity and possibility of increasing participation by the population in the improvement of its standard of living. As we head toward the nineties, a caring and responsible society will emphasize decentralization, deregulation, substitution and privatization."

Several Governments recognized the need to encourage a partnership between Governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals to improve and diversify the delivery of social services.

41. There was repeated emphasis on the importance of achieving more extensive regional and interregional co-operation, so as to promote social progress and enhance social well-being in each country. Development aid, in the provision of social services, should be directed at helping people to help themselves, and at strengthening existing human and institutional resources, so that developing countries could solve their problems in keeping with the natural environment.

42. In the view of one Government of a developing country, alternative social programmes needed to be established, to respond to emerging socio-economic issues, with special reference to appropriate and innovative strategies. Another Government of a developing country thought that the Commission should advocate a social development policy that would take into account all the definitions, aspects and potential opportunities for participation and abandon the Welfare State approach, in which all services were provided by the Government.

### 3. Specific groups of the population

43. Most Governments expressed continued interest in discussing the situation of particular social groups. Those most commonly mentioned, youth, the aging, and the disabled, could also be considered within the framework of the monitoring of plans and programmes of action (see sect. B above).

### 4. Other issues

#### (a) Poverty

44. Several Governments stated that poverty was an important societal problem, requiring solutions based on local, regional and international co-operation. The Commission might usefully recommend strategies for the eradication of poverty, including social programmes targeted at the most needy.

(b) The family

45. The important role of the family in society was stressed by one Government, which considered it to be one of the most important subjects for social policy. It suggested that the Commission was an appropriate forum for the consideration of such issues as: methods to strengthen the family; the effects of the changing nature of families on social progress; and ways to safeguard the rights of single-parent families. There was also support for the proclamation of an international year of the family. Another Government also requested that attention be given to the social situation of families.

(c) Long-term unemployed workers

46. One Government cited the problems of the long-term unemployed, and in particular the social implications for the unskilled and poorly skilled, given the extent of structural unemployment in many countries. The prospects for such people in the labour market could well be poor, leaving them to attempt suicide or resort to petty crime and drug addiction. Another Government cited the problem of unemployment, particularly among women who were heads of households and among young people. It urged the Commission to consider strategies which would create opportunities for satisfying employment, so that everyone could contribute to national development.

(d) Homeless people

47. The increasing numbers of homeless people present a growing problem, which is not only economic but also social and cultural. One Government suggested that the Commission should catalogue the social and cultural aspects of that problem.

(e) Minors requiring special attention and care

48. The precarious situation of some minors and juveniles was mentioned by one Government, noting the growing concern for them reflected in the extra resources Governments had committed to the problem and the important contributions of non-governmental organizations and of the community itself. It suggested that the agenda of the Commission at its next session should include a discussion of minors in need of special attention and care; the problem was universal and appropriate measures to improve the situation could be developed.

(f) Migrant workers and their families

49. Several Governments expressed concern about the social situation of migrant workers and their families; in particular, attention was drawn to the need for international co-operation. One Government recommended that the Commission catalogue national, regional and interregional experience with the reception and social integration of migrants and refugees, emphasizing interracial relations, integration, schooling, and their overall participation in the new society. Another Government recommended that the Commission consider problems associated with migration from developing countries, and in particular the social costs of the "brain drain". A third Government viewed the issue from the perspective of race and culture, and suggested that the Commission might focus on minorities in general.

(g) Social indicators

50. One Government underlined the need to develop social indicators to measure progress of social policy, and for the Commission to arrive at common terminology and agreed definitions. In its view, "the present situation all

too frequently allows for a wide range of interpretations, and sometimes questions of social welfare and social policy are discussed from a variety of not very well defined and most probably differing points of view".

(h) Alcoholism

51. A number of Governments expressed concern about the social aspects of alcoholism. They strongly recommended the inclusion of that question in the agenda of the Commission, with a view to determining the role of the United Nations Office at Vienna Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. Attention should be given to the formulation of a more complete and consolidated approach to the problem, including a determined international effort to deal with its social aspects. One Government called on the Commission to define ways of combating various forms of addiction in the developing countries.

## III. IMPROVING THE SUBSTANTIVE OUTPUT OF THE COMMISSION

### A. Resolutions and policy recommendations

52. The principal task of the Commission is to provide advice to the Economic and Social Council in accordance with the rules of procedure of the Council and of its subsidiary bodies. Such advice can be embodied in resolutions adopted by the Commission, on matters within its competence, or in draft resolutions and decisions for adoption by the Council.

53. As stated in the annex to Commission resolution 30/2, the number of draft resolutions adopted by the Commission has been increasing, which made it difficult for the Commission to give adequate policy guidance and establish priorities. Most took the form of draft resolutions for adoption by the Council. Accordingly, in order to be more effective, the Commission had agreed to reduce as much as possible the number of resolutions adopted at each session and, at the same time, to provide advice on relevant issues in the form of Commission resolutions containing detailed and practical recommendations (para. 6). Moreover, those resolutions would contain the Commission's analysis of a situation and its policy recommendations, with their rationale (para. 7). For subjects requiring action by the Council, the Commission would prepare draft resolutions for adoption by that body; they would include problems or policies whose nature and priority were such that they merited further discussion by the Council (para. 8).

54. A reduction in the number of resolutions would allow the Commmission to spend more time on specific recommendations and informal consultations. The burden on Secretariat support services, especially translation, would also be reduced. That would facilitate the processing of draft proposals, which could then be available earlier in all languages, thus allowing more time for their further refinement before action was taken.

55. More emphasis on resolutions adopted by the Commission, as proposed in paragraphs 6 and 7 of the annex to resolution 30/2, would not necessarily reduce the work-load, either for the Commission or the Secretariat. It should, however, make it possible to reduce the average number of preambular paragraphs in each resolution, and would be in keeping with the wishes of the Commission that draft resolutions be kept as concise and concrete as possible (para. 6).

56. The Commission also favoured sessional working groups to help prepare conclusions and recommendations, having already used this mechanism at its twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth sessions. At its thirtieth session, the Commission established two sessional working groups to consider specific questions, as well as a working group on draft resolutions, which sought, in an informal setting, to avoid duplication and harmonize and limit requests to the Secretary-General, particularly those calling for reports.

57. These working groups clearly facilitated the Commission's work. At the same time, the limitations of the mechanism were revealed when as many as three working groups were established at a single session. As they met before, during and after the regular sessions of the Commission, interpretation was not available. The timing clashed with that of informal regional meetings. As two or more working-groups and/or regional group meetings were inevitably held concurrently, smaller delegations could not participate in all of them. The timing also tended to conflict with the regular sessions, so that less time was available to plenary sessions when interpretation was available.

58. Accordingly, the proposed programme of work for the present session (document E/CN.5/1989/L.1) provides for the ad hoc open-ended working group on the question of aging to hold some meetings during the time allocated to the regular sessions, when interpretation is available.

59. Should this procedure prove helpful, the Commission might consider extending it to future sessions, particularly for the topics selected for in-depth consideration. This would mean a reduction in the time devoted to general discussion and a corresponding increase in the time available to open-ended working groups dealing with selected issues.

## B. Preparation for substantive discussions

60. Effective organizing of the Commission's work during sessions is closely linked to the proper preparation and consultation among members in advance of sessions. In paragraph 11 of the annex to Commission resolution 30/2, it was suggested that use be made of governmental and non-governmental expert advice in formulating recommendations; the existing ad hoc expert group mechanism, customarily used in implementing the social development programme, could be more closely linked to the Commission's agenda and, subject to the availability of resources, other meetings of experts could be held to discuss subjects selected by the Commission.

61. In response to the Secretary-General's note verbale, a number of Governments reiterated their support for such a measure. The Commission could request such meetings to prepare recommendations that could be used as a basis for its own discussion of a selected topic.

62. The Commission may wish to recall that two types of expert meetings are convened by the United Nations to implement the social development programme. Meetings financed from technical co-operation resources under the regular budget are essentially training workshops and could be used most effectively to ensure the follow-up of Commission recommendations. The other type of meeting is typically financed by Governments from voluntary, earmarked or other extra-budgetary resources provided in cash or kind, for example conference facilities or travel; this type of meeting could be more effectively used as a preparatory forum for the Commission's in-depth discussion of selected topics.

## IV. MEMBERSHIP AND FREQUENCY AND DURATION OF SESSIONS

63. The Special Commission of the Economic and Social Council on the In-Depth Study of the United Nations Intergovernmental Structure and Functions in the Economic and Social Fields considered the mandate, functions, membership and frequency of meetings of the Commission for Social Development, on the basis of Commission resolution 30/2 and other background material provided by the Secretariat at its request. The Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna was also asked to make a statement. This dealt, inter alia, with the role of the Commission for Social Development and the support provided to it by the Secretariat. The Chairman of the Special Commission also made a fact-finding visit to the United Nations Secretariat units and organizations based at Vienna.

64. The Special Commission did not reach agreement on changes in the structure and functioning of intergovernmental organizations in the economic and social fields, nor did it offer specific recommendations to guide the Commission for Social Development in making further recommendations to the Economic and Social Council.

65. In responding to the note verbale of the Secretary-General, on themes for in-depth discussion at future sessions of the Commission for Social Development, some Governments provided additional information. One stated that the frequency and duration of sessions of the Commission for Social Development should be such as to permit it to perform its important tasks satisfactorily. A number of Governments felt that it might be appropriate to convene the Commission annually. That would be in line with the periodicity of other functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, such as the Commission on Human Rights. Alternatively, one Government suggested an increase in the duration of sessions to three weeks.

66. A number of other Governments suggested adjustments in the organization of work, which might make it unnecessary for the Commission to meet more frequently or for a longer duration. One Government considered the current frequency of meetings adequate for the tasks to be performed.

67. Several Governments favoured expanding the membership of the Commission. One of these noted that, as social problems directly affected the interests of all Member States, it was legitimate to ask whether the size and composition of the Commission adequately reflected the diversity of the modern world. Together with another Government it suggested that it was necessary to increase membership to the level currently in effect, or being discussed in other functional commissions of the Council, such as the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women, namely an increase from 32 to 43 members. In contrast to these views, one Government stated that it found the present size and composition of the Commission to be suitable.

68. In order to help the Commission to make appropriate recommendations to the Economic and Social Council, it may be useful to recall a number of considerations placed before it at its thirtieth session.

69. The Commission currently meets every two years, and each session lasts for eight working days. It has no subsidiary bodies reporting to it, although it is empowered to recommend the convening of subsidiary bodies to deal with specific issues. Whether the present arrangements and allocation of time are adequate for the Commission to discharge its functions effectively depends very much on the scope of the Commission's agenda and the range of issues that the Council may refer to it. Various suggestions have been discussed at past sessions of both the Commission and the Council regarding the frequency of sessions, their duration, and the possibility of convening special sessions on particular topics, but no specific conclusions were reached.

70. In 1981, the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Social Aspects of the Development Activities of the United Nations recommended that the Commission should hold annual sessions in order to ensure a systematic annual examination of its reports by the Council and action by the General Assembly (E/1981/3, para. 96). Conversely, a number of decisions of the Economic and Social Council (resolution 1768 (LIV)) and the General Assembly (resolution 38/32) call for a biennial cycle of meetings of subsidiary bodies. Also, in its recommendation 2, endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 41/213, the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations called for the Assembly and the Council to "request their subsidiary bodies to review urgently their current agendas and schedules of meetings in order to reduce substantially their number, frequency and duration". 2/

## V. SECRETARIAT SUPPORT

71. In the annex to resolution 30/2, the Commission stated that the work of the Secretariat in support of the Commission should be streamlined by ensuring that the reports were more concise, were consolidated to avoid repetition, maintained a balanced presentation of views and concentrated on the possible conclusions to be considered by the Commission (para. 14). Steps have been taken to implement these suggestions.

72. The Commission may wish to give further attention to the number and frequency of reports requested. Attention is drawn to Economic and Social Council resolution 1981/83, and in particular to Council resolution 1982/50. In paragraph 1(j) of the latter, the Council urged all its subsidiary bodies to exercise the utmost restraint in making requests of the Secretary-General for new reports and studies and to implement fully the decisions of the Council and the General Assembly on the control and limitation of documentation.

## Notes

1/ See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Supplement No. 7 (E/1987/20), chap. I, sect. D.

2/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 49 (A/41/49), chap. II, sect. A.